

POLICY BRIEF

Young people and **COVID-19** in Thailand:

Findings from a series of online surveys



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The COVID-19 pandemic has been disrupting youth life since 2020. In Thailand, the government responded to the severe threat it poses to public health by imposing a nationwide lockdown that started in late March 2020. During the lockdown, students were not able to physically access their educational institutions, many businesses that employ young people were forced to scale down or cease operations, and domestic as well as international travel became heavily restricted. While the lockdown proved to be successful and officially ended on 1 July 2020, life hasn't yet returned to normal as social distancing still needs to be practiced, in particular given the recent resurgence of the pandemic in Thailand.

It is crucial to understand the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on youth life. After all, even in the absence of global pandemic, young people have to overcome many challenges as they develop their identity, go through sexual maturation, graduate from school or institutions of higher education and enter the labor force. Therefore, the United Nations sub-group on young people, convened by UNFPA and in collaboration with the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, surveyed a sample of five particular groups of young people in Thailand.

Data were collected from samples of

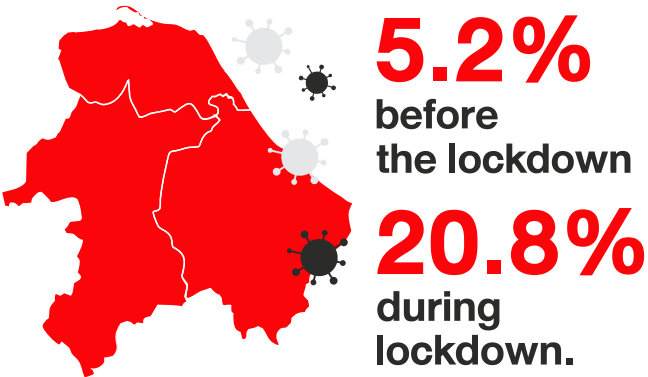
the general youth population	1005
ethnic minority and stateless youth	818
teenage mothers	90
youth from Thailand's three southernmost provinces	215
youth with disabilities	186

The four latter groups were selected, because they were deemed particular vulnerable to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. The survey was conducted online between 4 May and 30 July 2020.

The results of the study show that the pandemic, in fact, had a strong impact on youth life. Information on young people's concerns regarding the COVID-19 crisis was collected from youth from Thailand's three southernmost provinces, teenage mothers and ethnic minority and stateless youth. One of their main concerns was the risk of infection with COVID-19 itself, even though young people tend to be less susceptible to the adverse health effects of such an infection than older parts of the population. Still, young people were worried about that risk and also the possibility that some of their loved ones, such as their parents, would contract the virus. However, the study also revealed that not all young people in Thailand are covered by health insurance, or at least are not aware of their rights in that regard.

In the general youth population, youth with disabilities and youth from Thailand's three southernmost provinces, respondents were asked about their employment status before, during and after the lockdown. In all of these three groups of young people, the unemployment rate increased substantially during the lockdown.

One of the groups that experienced the strongest rise in unemployment were youth from Thailand's three southernmost provinces, which had an unemployment rate of



Since the lifting of the lockdown restrictions, the unemployment rate in that group has decreased to 10.4%, which is still double as high as before the lockdown. Other heavily affected youth were those who worked as daily wage workers, freelancers, one-person businesses and employees of private companies.

A large proportion of respondents in the online surveys on youth from Thailand's three southernmost provinces, teenage mothers and ethnic minority and stateless youth also reported their concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their education. In fact, since physical access to educational institutions was impossible for months, students were largely left with remote, online learning as their only option to continue their studies and prepare for their future careers.

Not all students had the means to use online learning.

53% many youth from ethnic minorities were hampered by slow internet connections in their communities

90% a lack of access to a personal computer in their household

41% Youth with disabilities struggled in their attempts to engage in online learning, because many online learning courses were not barrier-free

These limitations made it difficult for those groups of young people to adopt online learning and might continue to negatively affect their education. Even though, physical access to many educational institutions has been granted again since the lifting of the lockdown restrictions, it is possible that online learning will continue to play an important role in the educational sector.

Moreover, according to the online survey that was conducted among the general youth population, a noticeable share of young people experienced problems in accessing sexual and reproductive health services during the COVID-19 crisis. Among respondents in that survey,

28% of those who identified themselves as being heterosexual and

39% of those who identified themselves as being LGBT experienced problems in accessing sexual and reproductive health services.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Looking forward, Thailand can further improve its support to young people during the COVID-19 pandemic by:

- 1 providing access to general healthcare as well as sexual and reproductive health services to all young people in the country,
- 2 making modern ways of learning, in particular online learning, accessible for all youth, including those who are disadvantaged or have special needs, and giving financial support to those young people who have not yet benefitted from the beginning recovery of the economy.

There are further aspects of youth life that have been effected by the pandemic, such as their ability to socialize, their mental health and their ability to practice their religion, to name just a few. And there are further particularly vulnerable groups of young people, such as teenage mothers and young people who are stateless. A full report with the detailed results of the series of online surveys will be available at the UNFPA Thailand website.

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